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Congressman Michael R. Turner, Chairman



OVERSIGHT HEARING

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL R. TURNER, CHAIRMAN

Hearing topic: *"Historic Preservation vs. Katrina: What Role Should Federal, State and Local Governments Play in Preserving Historic Properties Affected by this Catastrophic Storm?"*

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

10:00 am

Room 2154 Rayburn House Office Building

As we all know, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005 heavily damaging the entire region. The storm will be the costliest in US history and may be the greatest natural disaster ever to hit our nation. The first priority, of course, is rebuilding the lives, communities and businesses impacted by the storm. Nonetheless, historic preservation should be part of our response – both as an economic revitalization tool and to save our historic legacy.

From a historical perspective, the Gulf Coast region is one that is abundant in national treasures. For example, it is the site of numerous ancient Native American mounds and structures. It is the site of many remnants of the nation's colonial roots. It is a memory of a time when Louis XIV first determined that the French should have a stake in the New World. It is an example of the former glory of Spain. It is rich in African American history and culture. It is the birthplace of Jazz and Mississippi Delta Blues. It is a place of tradition and beauty. It is nothing less than a showcase of not only national, but of world history.

The destruction of historic properties has been massive. The numbers are staggering because the Gulf Coast Region has one of nation's highest concentrations of historic structures. Historically important properties can be found throughout the hurricane impacted area and thousands of them are at risk of being lost forever.

Federal, state and local governments, as well as the non-governmental organizations, need to coordinate a timely, sufficient and targeted response to this historic preservation disaster. Time is an issue. Historically important structures have already been torn down and structures that can be saved must be stabilized before they too are lost forever.

There is hope. The infrastructure needed to implement historic rehabilitation programs is already in place. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 created a strong federal preservation program, which is administered by the Department of the Interior. This program relies heavily on State Historic Preservation Offices and their local partners. Even though the National Historic Preservation Act has a built in infrastructure to deal with saving our historical treasures, Hurricane Katrina was so massive and widespread that we need to explore additional ways to ensure that historic preservation is a priority.

A coalition of national preservation organizations led by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the American Institute of Architects have proposed a legislative package for preservation efforts in the disaster area. The package proposes using the existing infrastructure to provide new grants, tax credits and waivers as incentives to restoring historic properties damaged by the hurricane.

Today's hearing will explore: (1) the roles of the federal, state and local governments in responding to Katrina, (2) the legislative package proposed by the National Trust and the American Institute of Architects, and (3) other recommendations.

I look forward to the expert testimony our distinguished panel of leaders will provide today. Thank you all for your time and welcome.

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